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ABSTRACT

The different ways in which researchers have conceptualized Latin American education are identified. Written for an encyclopedia of educational research, this entry does not seek to describe and compare education "as it is" in some 28 Latin American republics. Rather it characterizes and compares how Latin American education has appeared to Latin American and other researchers over time. Four qualitatively different ways have been used to characterize Latin American education: (1) functionalist; (2) radical functionalist; (3) interpretive; and (4) radical interpretive. These approaches and the accompanying research are discussed in detail. A 59-item bibliography is included. (DB)

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EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA-COMPARATIVE

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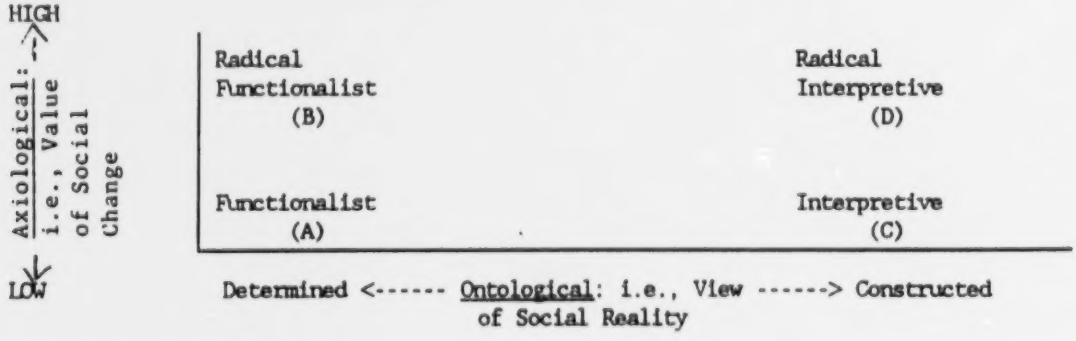
Encyclopedic representations of Latin American education to date have largely chosen to focus on structure-i.e., the characteristics of formal educational systems, and on problems of achieving efficiency or ideological consistency (Avalos, 1976; Brock & Lawlor, 1985; Brock, 1987; Behrman, 1988; Paulston, 1991). In contrast, we propose a "reflexive turn", an interpretive approach that identifies the qualitatively different ways in which researchers have experienced and conceptualized Latin American education as sets of categories. This entry does not seek to describe and compare education "as it is" in some 28 Latin American republics. Rather it characterizes and compares how Latin American education has appeared to Latin American and other researchers over time. Marton (1988) describes this approach as phenomenographic, i.e., how people experience and conceptualize various aspects of their world as given sets of categories. This entry seeks to identify such categories in Latin American educational research as a form of discovery, as reflection on how educational research is "seeing" phenomena in this area.

To this end, exemplary research studies as discourse are categorized in Figure 1 using ontological and axiological dimensions to distinguish four qualitatively different ways that have been used to apprehend the vast complexity of Latin American education, i.e., the (a) functionalist, (b) radical functionalist, (c) interpretive, and (d) radical interpretive categories. This study builds upon earlier phenomenographic efforts found in Paulston (1977), Burrell and Morgan (1979), and Ashmore (1989).

Figure 1. Discourse Categories in Latin American Educational Studies



Functionalist Representations

This research framing perspective, dominant in social science and comparative education studies for over a century, views reality as determined by material existence and knowable through positivist philosophy

and empirical method. As the Industrial Revolution unfolded, three major variants, i.e., "evolutionary" functionalism, structural functionalism, and neo-functionalism, have each in their time sought to represent Latin American education.

In U.S. studies of Latin American education, "evolutionary" functionalist views predominated in U.S. Bureau of Education bulletins, beginning in 1868 with sympathetic accounts of attempts to create public instruction in the young sister republics of Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Uruguay (Smith, 1923). With expansion of U.S. colonialism and trade after the defeat of Spain in 1898, research discourse became more prescriptive in specifying how the U.S. "democratic" model should replace the centralized, bureaucratic, elitist educational legacy of Spanish colonialism, especially in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Peru (Paulston, 1971; Epstein, 1987). The evolutionary functionalist variant is seldom chosen today. The last major example is Atcon's proposal (1970) to USAID for a biological-evolutional model where "controlled mutations" via Latin American university reforms would be transmitted to society and production thus providing "a constructive path to social progress and human improvement" via social evolution.

Structural functional perspectives grounded in modernization theory and human capital economics came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s with the Alliance for Progress and greatly expanded involvement of international assistance agencies in efforts to make educational systems more efficient and functional in economic and social development efforts (Lyons, 1965; ECLA, 1968; Bruck, 1969; Castro, 1980). Under pressure from successful national educational reforms in revolutionary Cuba and from functional assessments of increasing educational dysfunction and inefficiency, Latin American educational planners with heavy external assistance sought widespread top-down innovative change in educational curriculum, teacher education, administration, planning, and research capabilities (McGinn & Davis, 1969; Corvalán, 1988). While efforts to link both formal and non-formal education with industrial growth continue, they have, according to La Belle (1987), largely failed to promote modern skills and behaviors let alone to overcome deep-seated social and ethnic divisions and problems of dependency, repression, inequality, and poverty.

Partly in response to limitations of the structural-functionalist perspective-i.e., its assumptions of consensus and its ignoring of structured inequality and the role of power in change-a third or neo-

functionalist variant has recently gained ascendancy in educational studies. This orientation advocates recognition of descensus and conflict as the way to improve systems functioning-i.e., it is less determined by so-called economic "rationality" (Gleich, 1989). It also tolerates higher change goals such as system-wide reforms involving interest group bargaining. Exemplars of this category include Levy's (1986) account of private higher education's challenge to politicized state universities, Farrell's (1986) history of the dysfunctionality of radical egalitarian educational reform in Allende's Chile, and Lehmann and Verhine's (1988) critique of narrow human capital approaches that erroneously saw education as both the problem and the solution. Neo-functionalist discourse proposes a more reflective functionalism, or what Cherryholmes (1988) has termed, a move beyond "vulgar" functionalism to a model that recognizes important contextual variables such as SES class advantages, personalism, patronage, and how education and the labor market are also constrained by non-economic considerations (Leonard, 1988; Plank, 1988).

Radical Functionalist Representations

Defining characteristics shared by functionalist and radical functionalist discourse include (a) an outside, materialist view of reality, (b) a structuralist view that education is interrelated-even determined, by social and political sectors, and (c) a belief in technology, planning, and social evolution, or "progress." Core differences revolve around the radical functionalist's view that education is "functional" in elite efforts to legitimize and maintain their privilege and economic advantage. Because schools are seen to mirror and reproduce the inequality of the larger society, low-level change in education in view as futile without radical transformation of social and economic structures (Carnoy, 1990).

Radical functionalist discourse by Latin American and foreign scholars has over the years provided a powerful critique of capitalism, of functionalism, and of piecemeal innovation attempts in grossly inequitable Latin American educational systems. Mariátegui (1952), an exemplar of this view and a founder of the peruvian Communist Party, critiqued U.S. educational reform efforts of 1920 in his country as a defense of "the privilege of class and wealth . . . it relegated children of the proletariat to special schools and made it impossible for the children of workers to enroll in secondary or higher schools." This "correspondence theory" that Latin American schooling corresponds to and reproduces the inequality required

by capitalist economic systems is this perspective's defining characteristic (Carnoy & Wertheim, 1980). Accordingly, radical transformation of the means of production and underlying power relations are seen as the necessary and sufficient conditions if education is to be made more equitable and efficient. Attempts at social and educational reconstruction in Cuba and Nicaragua guided by radical structural perspectives have been seen both as a validation of the "correspondence principle" (Bowles, 1971; Carnoy & Wertheim, 1980; Kolésnikov, 1983; Torres, 1989), and from a functionalist view, as a continuation of the Latin American anti-democratic, authoritarian tradition (Richmond, 1987). From our interpretive perspective we share Padula and Smith's (1988) assessment of Cuban efforts to radically transform society and education as paradoxical in their opening of structures, while limiting personal freedom and monopolizing or determining "truth."

Interpretive Representations

The lack of a strong interpretive research tradition in Latin American educational studies can be seen as a consequence of the information needs of highly centralized educational bureaucracies and the limited resources available to support researchers. While descriptive and speculative writings on education in Latin America predominate, these are notable for the lack of an empirical data base (Egginton, 1983). It is important not to characterize these polemical, oratorical works as interpretive in the sense use here.

Interpretive research perspectives stress understanding and explaining education and the social world from the inside, i.e., by utilizing the points of view of those directly involved. Rather than seeing human beings as environmentally determined, interpretive research--as in this study, focuses on the way views of "education" are constructed, modified, and interpreted by people. Here interpretive research is an attempt to move beyond normative models to observe actual social dynamics in the educational process. Policy suggestions from this perspective are based less on criteria of efficiency and more on criteria of relevance and shared meanings (Rockwell, 1980; Rockwell and Mercado, 1986; Perez, Abiega, Zarco, & Sugurensky, 1986).

The Interpretive perspective is further characterized by a low-change orientation. Rather than advocating a radical structural change for the whole society, interpretive research tends to suggest or

imply adjustments in processes or awarenesses that would improve upon existing arrangements by enabling them to operate with more relevance and meaning for the participants (Moore, 1973; Modiano, 1973; Rockwell & Mercado, 1986).

Ethnographic studies conducted in the 1940s and 1950s by U.S. anthropologists appear as the first disciplined use of the interpretive perspective in research on Latin American education (e.g., Redfield, 1943; Landy, 1959; Brameld, 1959). These studies conceptualized education in the broad anthropological sense as a process of cultural transmission. They compared how participants viewed the relevance of schools vis-a-vis traditional forms of informal education such as child-rearing practices, ritual, or oral traditions. Most anthropological studies through the 1980s continue to be guided by some notion of cultural transmission and cultural conflict between modern and traditional cultures, i.e., continuity and discontinuity via socialization or enculturation (Foley, 1977). Insensitivity of schooling to local cultures and the perceived lack of relevance of formal education are frequently critiqued.

Interpretive exemplars in framing research on Latin American education from this view are Moore's Life Cycles in Atchalan (1973) and Modiano's Indian Education in the Chiapas Highlands (1973). Both view the formal educational systems that they study as fully comprehensible only within their immediate socio-cultural milieu and both strive to get at the participants' perceptions of the formal educational process. Their principal arguments hinge upon noting a lack of shared intersubjectivity between the meaning systems of the social classes, and cultures that participate in the educational process. Both authors argue that this results in a lack of understanding in the classroom as well as different interpretations of the relevance of educational situation, goals, etc. From the interpretive perspective the desired outcome is, in general, a clarification of the subjective meanings involved in the educational process. In studies that have prescribed changes for Latin American educational systems it is usually argued that organized educational programs must take these subjective factors into account in order to be more tolerant, humane, and adaptive to the needs of participants who display very different attitudes and orientations than those often assumed by educational policy-makers (Tedesco, 1983, 1987; Magandzo, 1986). Both Moore and Modiano conclude their studies with suggestions aimed at affecting the national-level management of educational

efforts. In doing so, they do not use criteria of efficiency but rather attempt to alter the sensitivity of educational decision-makers toward the validity of local cultures as well as to create a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions of formal education given their actual circumstances.

Radical Interpretive Representations

The radical interpretive framework has been used since the 1960s to focus exclusively on adult non-formal education. This perspective is firmly rooted in a commitment to liberation from domination and fundamental social change. It rejects mechanical notions of economic determinism that posit a pre-ordained reality or an imposed modernization agenda to which human beings must adapt. Education is always seen as a political process that either reinforces an inequitable status quo through control of consciousness, or seeks to change it through critical reflection (Freire, 1970s, 1970b, 1985; Gutierrez, 1973).

The core problem for radical interpretivists is the entrenched inequity in Latin American society that results in a dehumanization of both the haves and have-nots. They argue that, as a result of generations of material and social inequality, the poor of Latin America have internalized the dominant sectors' conceptions of them as ignorant, lazy, and unworthy. They thus fatalistically accept their social position in life and feel powerless to change it. Education's key role from this perspective is to liberate the colonized consciousness' of the poor so that they can fully develop as human beings and begin to participate as subjects rather than objects in the historical process. The desired outcome of such an approach is to actively involve the poor in changing their life conditions which will then lead to fundamental changes in existing social relationships (Arnove, 1986).

Although Paulo Freire's (1970a, 1970b, 1985) representations are the exemplar par excellence of the radical interpretivist framework in Latin American educational discourse, his writings represent but one source that has guided the development of educational programs which adopt this perspective. Liberation theology, nationalist revolutionary movements, and some ethnic movements have added important elements to this perspective in Latin America (Borge, 1980; Gutierrez, 1984).

Authors choosing this perspective advocate research which is integrated with social action to transform the conditions of life for the poor. Investigation is conceived of as a process of the social

production of knowledge and experiences directly developed within a social base in which all members participated in all stages. The terms action research and participatory research are usually used to categorize this approach (Magendzo, 1986; Vio Grossi, et al., 1981; Werthein, 1985). Research for radical interpretivists is used primarily as a guide to selecting the most effective educative actions to meet consciousness-raising needs.

Radical interpretive discourse contributes to the political polarization of the haves and have-nots of Latin America and represents a direct challenge to both the expert-centered approaches of the structural-functionalist and the vanguard-centered approach of the radical functionalists. However, as Arnove (1986) notes in his study of education in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, the participatory aspects of popular education programs are frequently characterized by top-down control and unreflective transmission of political messages. Thus even the widespread acceptance of a radical interpretive perspective does not easily negate a still powerful tradition of the authoritarian state with its implications for framing educational discourse and practice.

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